

SACRED STICKS OR BULL-ROARERS.

As exemplified by specimens in the Queensland Museum Collections.

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(Plates XII to XVII.)

So much has been published about Bull-roarers that it is quite superfluous to reiterate all that has been written or even give a brief summary of their significance. My object here is rather to assist the student who may some day feel disposed to bring all our knowledge upon this subject up to date and incorporate it in a useful whole. I thus place on record illustrations of our principal bull-roarers, all, with the exception of two New Guinea specimens (the two last noted), coming from Queensland, and bearing a very marked and general resemblance to whirlers from other parts of Australia.

The ethnological student is constantly made to realise that the various divisions of Australia into States are only arbitrary, and have nothing whatever to do with the distribution of tribes, clans, &c., since the natives knew no bounds except the bounds produced by distance and by inability to cover the enormous distances on foot.

Even the most casual glance at the plates (Nos. XII to XVI) will convince the reader of this; indeed, so remarkably similar are some of them (*see* Plate XII, fig. 1) to the wooden Churingas described by Spencer and Gillen,* that one might almost suppose the Queensland specimens to have come from the same localities.

Bull-roarers are universal throughout Queensland. The belief in them as sacred objects seems to have been comparatively simple, though as objects of tabu to women, children, and perhaps to the uninitiated they have ever been regarded as mysteries calculated to give their owners, using them, increased power and privilege.

† Dr. Roth, speaking of North-West-Central Queensland, tells us that the smaller whirring boards of about 4 inches in length and no gravings on them, sometimes red-ochred, are used as toys or playthings indiscriminately by either sex and at any age.

The graved and larger varieties of about 8 inches are used in the initiation ceremonies, and in the Yaroinga tribes of Queensland are put to the special use of love-charms.

* Spencer & Gillen: *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, 1899, chap. v.; also *Across Australia*, 1912, vol. 1, p. 208.

† W. E. Roth: *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*, p. 129, Brisbane, 1897.

* In Bull. 11, North Queensland Ethnography, Dr. Roth also figures two whirlers from Butcher's Hill used in rendering a baby "tabu." The use of such an implement for purposes of this kind is not universal.

With regard to the British New Guinea Bull-roarers I have little to say. Apparently social conditions and ceremonial life do not demand the use of such an implement, except rarely; as Mr. Douglas Rannie has pointed out to me, in those islands of the Pacific where most of the ceremonies take place in the "tabu" or "Gamal" houses no sacred implements such as the Bull-roarer are necessary, since no women or children would ever dream of going near such an abode of the mystic rites, and hence the sounding of the whirler would be superfluous. This is doubtless also the case among the Papuans of British New Guinea, except where ritual dances and observances are held out of doors, when the Bull-roarer is swung to render the ceremonial ground tabu to females.

† Seligman speaks of bull-roarers in use in Southern Massim at the Walaga Feast, but, since these are used on this occasion only and have no apparent utility, one is rather inclined to regard them as a dying relic of the past.

For the remainder the specimens will speak for themselves.

* W. E. Roth: North Queensland Ethnography, Bulletin No. 11; Records of the Australian Museum, vol. vii., No. 2, 1908.

† Dr. Seligman: The Melanesians of British New Guinea, 1910, p. 592.

PLATE XII.

BULL-ROARERS OR WOODEN CHURINGAS OF THE QUEENSLAND ABORIGINES.

Figure 1.

Dimensions: 366 mm. \times 51 mm.

The larger of the two, wrapped up and shown in Figure 2. Ornamented with numerous circles, which are in their turn connected by lines to the larger central concentric circles, and provided with a rough semicircular curve at each end. Reverse side similar (suggestive of a frog totem). Red ochre.

Locality: Glenormiston, North-West-Central Queensland. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/256.1.

Figure 2.

Two (figures 1 and 3) wrapped in old piece of pituri cloth (old sacking) and tied with the human hair cord attached to the whirlers. As carried about from place to place.

Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/256.

Figure 3.

Dimensions: 356 mm. \times 49 mm.

Lesser of the two shown in figure 2, wrapped up. Ornamented with down cemented with human blood (both sides). Red ochre.

Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/256.2.

Figure 4.

Two bull-roarers in tea-tree bark sheath (dilapidated). Specimen visible has no markings on reverse side.

Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Specimen No. Q.E. 13/250.

Figure 5.

Dimensions: 241 mm. \times 36 mm.

One of the two shown in figure 4 enclosed in a tea-tree bark sheath, with three sinuous lines running down the centre, suggestive of a snake-totem. The semicircles are arranged facing one another, the significance of which must not be lost sight of. No reverse markings of any kind. Red ochre. Roughly figured in Edge-Partington, p. 118 (Australia), No. 8.*

Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/250.1.

* Edge-Partington: Ethnographical Album of the Pacific Islands, third series, August, 1898.

NOTE.—In using the terms "obverse" and "reverse," it is understood that the obverse side is the one figured.—R.H.H.



BULL-ROVERS OR WHIRLERS.

PLATE XIII.

BULL-ROARERS OR WOODEN CHURINGAS OF THE QUEENSLAND ABORIGINES.

Figure 1.

Dimensions: 290 mm. \times 52 mm.

Native name "Wilmurra," Kalkadoon tribe. Roughly finished, concavo-convex, crude ornamentation in form of badly cut lines (in threes) on one side of the whirler only. Wood (very dark), though hard, splits easily in direction of grain. Provided with human hair cord, which is attached to hole and cemented with gum cement. Roughly figured in Edge-Partington (Australia), p. 118, No. 10; erroneously called "Wilmuna."

Locality: Leichhardt (Selwyn District), N. W. C. Queensland. Donated by Mr. A. Meston. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/237.

Figure 2.

Dimensions: 359 mm. \times 40 mm.

With two star-shaped designs, two semicircles, and numerous transverse lines; reverse side similar. The human hair cord attached to this specimen measures 5 ft. 6½ in. in length.

Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/239.

Figure 3.

Dimensions: 327 mm. \times 47 mm.

The outer portions smeared with blood, to which feather-down has been attached, a good deal of which has worn off in handling; human hair cord attached. The reverse side is ornamented with one large circle of concentric lines in the centre, and the remaining space is taken up by transverse lines of a very rough nature. Figured in Edge-Partington, p. 118, No. 5.

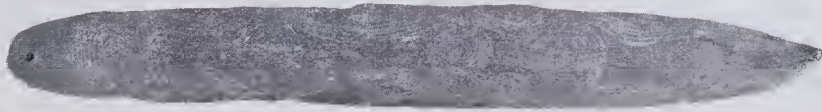
Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/240.

Figure 4.

Dimensions: 391 mm. \times 52 mm.

The five concentric circles are compassed on their sides by a series of five lines running snake-like nearly the whole length of the implement; four series of short lines occupy some of the short intervening spaces. Reverse side very similar.

Locality: Queensland (exact locality unknown). Specimen No.: Q.M. 13/254.



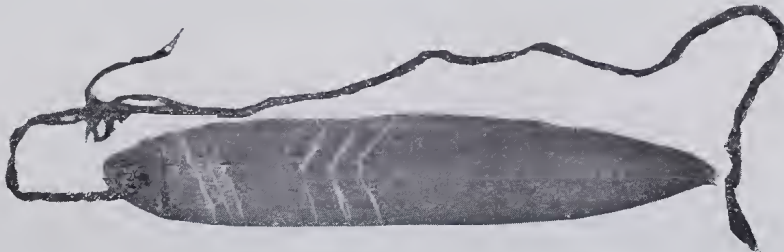
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BULL-ROARERS OR WHIRLERS.

PLATE XIV.

BULL-ROARERS OR WOODEN CHURINGAS OF THE QUEENSLAND ABORIGINES.

Figure 1.

Dimensions: 385 mm. \times 38 mm.

Five series of semicircular lines placed back to back, not facing one another. The reverse side similar, the circle being replaced by transverse lines. Hard wood; red ochre.

Locality: Queensland (exact locality unknown). Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/241.

Figure 2.

Dimensions: 325 mm. \times 37 mm.

Flat piece of wood, rudely shaped, pointed at each end and coloured with red ochre. One of the few Queensland churingas, ornamented with dots, so significantly introduced by the Central Australian tribes in their designs to represent the footprints of animals or the tracks of the men. Roughly figured in Edge-Partington (Australia), p. 118, No. 6.

Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/242.

Figure 3.

Dimensions: 492 mm. \times 50 mm.

Both the obverse and reverse sides ornamented with circles, finished off with occasional short series of lines. Red ochre.

Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/243.

Figure 4.

Dimensions: 340 mm. \times 39 mm.

The reverse side of this roarer, which is suggestive of a snake totem, is figured in Edge-Partington, p. 118, No. 7. Hardwood; red ochre.

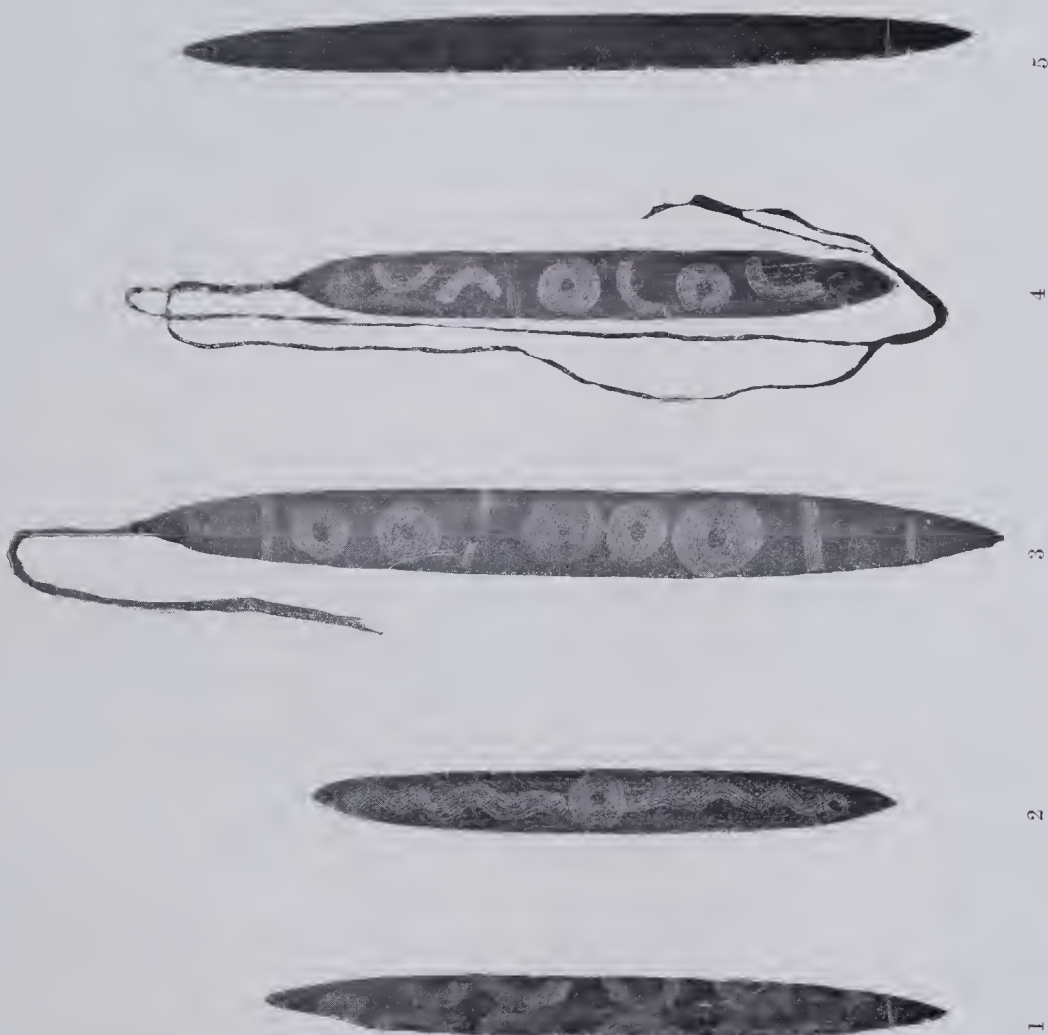
Locality: Western Border of Queensland. Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/244.

Figure 5.

Dimensions: 433 mm. \times 31 mm.

Plain with the exception of a row of small white marks arranged around the edges, nearly worn off (invisible in figure). Red ochre.

Locality: Queensland (exact locality unknown). Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/245.



WHIRLERS OR BULL-ROARERS.

PLATE XV.

BULL-ROARERS OR WOODEN CHURINGAS OF THE QUEENSLAND ABORIGINES.

Figures 1 and 2.

Two bull-roarers both made of the same soft white gum, possibly toys. The larger of the two, Specimen No. Q.E. 13/246, measures 161 mm. \times 23 mm.; whereas the smaller specimen, No. Q.E. 13/247, only measures 112 mm. \times 13 mm. The reverse sides differ slightly in pattern, and are if anything more rudely graved.

Locality: Georgina River, N. W. C. Queensland. Donated by Mr. Glissan.

Figure 3.

Dimensions: 182 mm. \times 21 mm.

Very roughly fashioned, especially on the reverse side, where the lines run into one another unintelligibly; acutely pointed at both ends. Probably a toy.

Locality: South-East Queensland. Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/248.

Figure 4.

Dimensions: 229 mm. \times 26 mm.

A roughly made and rather modern-looking implement. Reverse side provided with three very imperfect circles and a few rough lines top and bottom of the largest and uppermost one. Soft wood; red ochre. String instead of human hair cord.

Locality: Glenormiston: N. W. C. Queensland. Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/249.

Figure 5.

Dimensions: 125 mm. \times 7 mm.

A small implement made of scrub timber; just split, the nature of the wood (interlocked) being responsible for the wavy lines. No ornamentation of any kind visible. The human hair cord was originally attached to a piece of catgut which was fastened through the hole of the whirler.

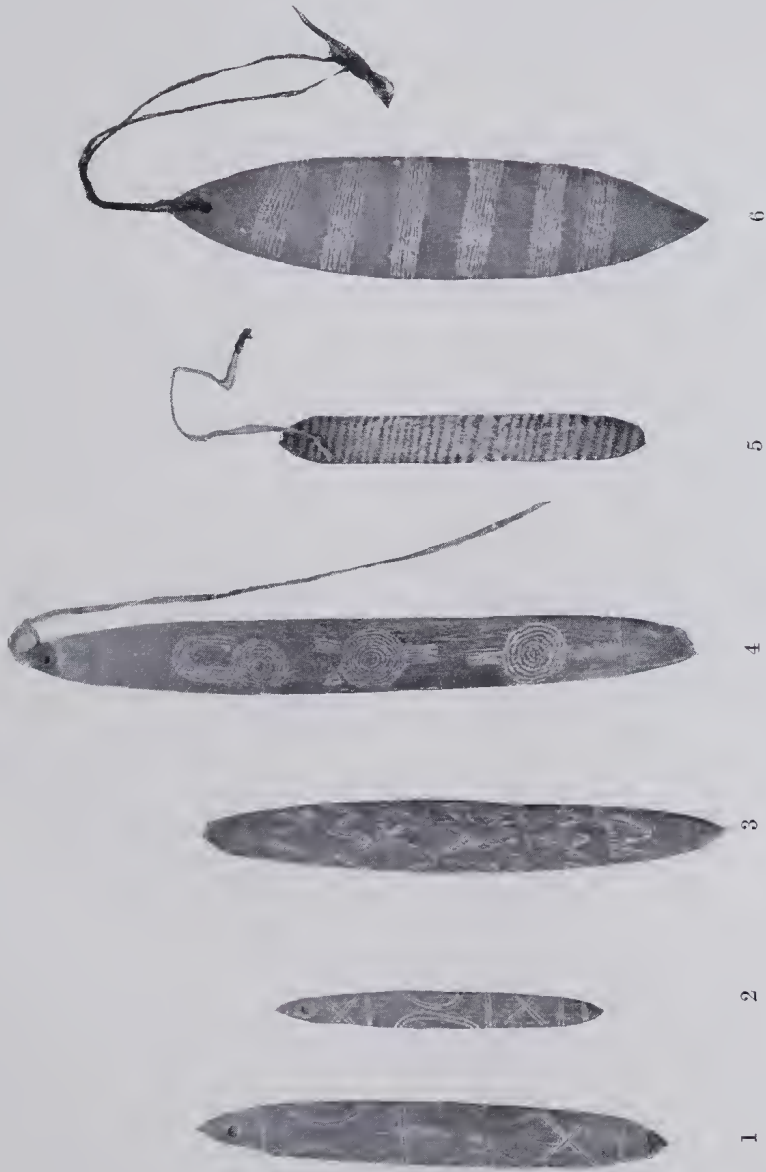
Locality: West of Charleville, Queensland. Donated by Mr. A. Meston. Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/251.

Figure 6.

Dimensions: 180 mm. \times 42 mm.

Obverse side almost identically the same as the reverse. Figured in Edge-Partington. p. 118, No. 9.

Locality: Glenormiston, N. W. C. Queensland. Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/252.



BULL-ROARERS OR WHIRLERS.

PLATE XVI.

BULL-ROARERS OR WOODEN CHURINGAS.

Two bullroarers exposed to show emu feathers wrapped up with them in cloth (modern). The cord attached to churingas is of human hair. Wood stained with red ochre. A different though similar pattern is graved on each side, mainly circles.

Locality: Upper Mulligan River, N. W. C. Queensland. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/236.



BULL-ROARERS OR WOODEN CHURINGAS IN WRAPPING—EXPOSED FOR VIEW.

Q.M. Specimen No.: Q.E. 13/236.

PLATE XVII.

Figure 1.

BULL-ROARER FROM OROKOLO, BRITISH NEW GUINEA.

668 mm. \times 100 mm.

Specimen Reg. No.: Q.M. E.13/219.

The front is ornamented with the crude figure of a reptile, probably a crocodile; the back is quite plain. "Attached to a long string on the end of a stick and swung round the head, giving forth a loud humming sound, sounded to warn the women and children to 'clear' before a dance." Used by the Papuans of the Gulf Division at the Kaiva Kuku Dances.

Figure 2.

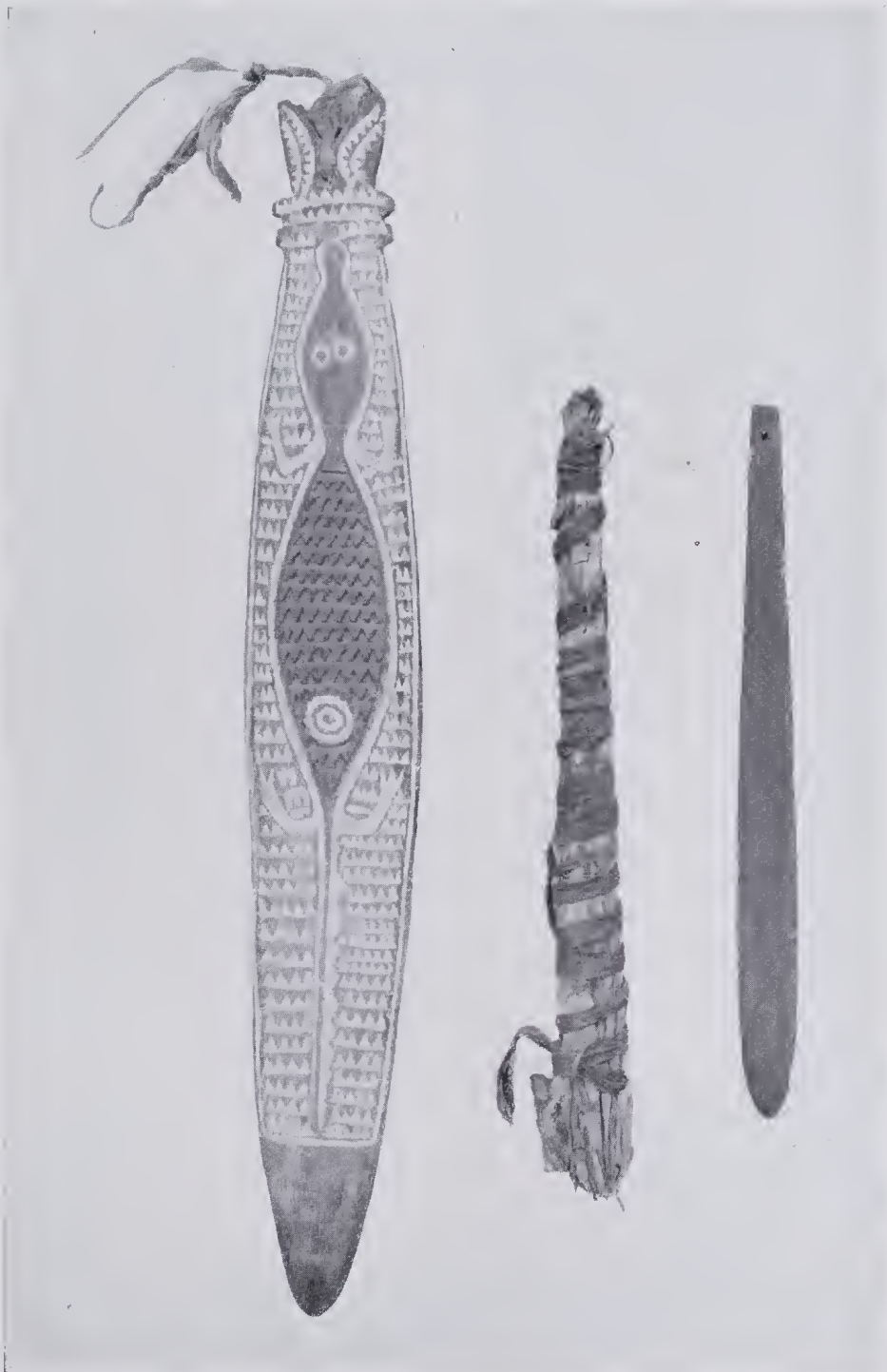
BULL-ROARER FROM THE MEKEO DISTRICT, BRITISH NEW GUINEA.

380 mm. \times 40 mm.

Specimen No.: N.G. 18639.

Front and back quite plain, spatulate shape, in sheath of bark. This specimen is figured in Edge-Partington* as a spatulate with no history, but thanks to His Excellency Sir William MacGregor, K.C.M.G., who collected it, we now know that it was used by masked men when proclaiming a "tabu" on coconuts in their tribe. The sheath is rather significant, and reminds one of the Queensland specimens.

* Edge-Partington: Ethnological Album of the Pacific Islands, third series, August, 1898, p. 73.



BULL-ROARERS.

1. Q.M. Specimen No. : E. 13/219.

2. Specimen No. : N.G. 18639, with sheath of bark.